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ABSTRACT

Research generally influences state policy only indirectly. On the other hand, research is not utterly without influence. For example, research findings about schools and colleges which have influenced policy include: the appendices that accompanied "On Further Examination," the College Board report on the SAT score decline; the Southern Regional Education Board's Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools; the Western Interstate Consortium for Higher Education's comprehensive national statistics on school populations; and the Taylor Murphy Institute's studies of the high school courses taken by black students in Virginia. Beyond these specific kinds of examples, policy makers rarely find in the research literature the kinds of background, analysis, and advice that support sound policy. If research is to contribute to policy formation, schools of education and NIE research labs should make policy studies a major research discipline; researchers should monitor the effectiveness of new curricula that were originally justified in terms of their effectiveness; and researchers should develop expertise with regard to the effectiveness of higher education. (BW)

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Research and State Policy Implementation

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The implementation of educational policy in the states is no one thing. We have at least fifty ways to govern and finance education. Virtually every state admits anomalies -- colleges that predate the system of higher education, and thus enjoy special privileges under their charters; school divisions that have sources of revenue or fiscal disabilities that require special legislative treatment; individual legislators, school superintendents, senior bureaucrats in budget or central education agencies, or other persons, whose personal influence in forming and implementing policy confounds executive and legislative game plans alike. For fifty or perhaps hundreds of reasons, we do not form or implement educational policy in simple, coherent ways.

This condition is by no means bad. In many respects, it conforms to plan. No central policy mechanism can hope to dominate the individual, sometimes isolated, decisions of largely independent local schools boards, or of more or less autonomous college governing boards and faculties. State action has relatively little to do with private education. Yet private and public schools and colleges influence one another, and backers of private education influence legislators and governors across the land. Legislation that blurs the distinction between state and local spans of control rarely lasts. Virtually all enduring educational legislation segregates the responsibilities of central agencies from the authority of local boards.

In this context, research generally influences policy only indirectly. Lyman Glenny's argument in 1959 for central state planning, coordination, or governance of public higher education probably justified some of the movement of the last twenty-five years toward consolidation of power in state-wide higher education boards and agencies, but I know no evidence to suggest that Glenny caused this movement. Rather, political and administrative considerations probably account for most of the change. John Millett's recent analysis of the relations between the central agencies and the colleges suggests strongly that where we are is not where we thought we were headed. Similarly, Michael Rutter and other school effectiveness researchers drew attention in the mid-1970's to the need for school reform, with emphasis on

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the curriculum, but effectiveness researchers have only intermittently influenced the legislative and board actions by which reform has begun to be implemented. The very considerable influence of the College Board's Educational EQuality project and similar effectiveness-based reform programs notwithstanding, state decisions commonly respond more to internal political concerns than to research findings.[1]

On the other hand, research is not utterly without influence. Perhaps it will be constructive to examine specific situations in which research findings about schools and colleges have influenced policy, and from these instances to generalize about what research can do, what it ought to do, and what it does not or cannot do. I will focus on four: the influence of the Appendices that accompanied On Further Examination, the report of the College Board's Wirtz Panel on the SAT score decline; the influence on reforms in curriculum and in teacher training of the Southern Regional Education Board's Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools; the influence on planning for public colleges of the Western Interstate Consortium for Higher Education's comprehensive national statistics on school populations; and in my own state, the Tayloe Murphy Institute's studies of the high school courses taken by black students, with related data on the impact of these programs on students' activities after high school.

Because the Wirtz Panel's report was explicitly a summary and analysis of the research findings of others, few researchers took it seriously.[2] Yet copies went to every governor, to virtually all significant legislative leaders, and to state superintendents and similar officials. Many read it. More than a few began promoting change in schools because of On Further Examination's summary of prior research. This report suggested that the score declines derived from many causes, most beyond the reach of public policy, but some related to such matters as which students were taking which courses. My own brief summary of the Wirtz Panel's findings was published by SREB and apparently circulated in various interstate meetings of governors and legislators.[3] This little paper is several years old now, but I know from my mail that people still read it and that several states have used it as a starting point for their own school reforms.

To see why the Wirtz Panel was able to influence policy by reproducing others' research findings, we need to remember two phenomena of the mid-1970's. First, the initial popular response to disclosure of the SAT score decline was bitterly hostile to schools. This response began in three articles by Jack McCurdy and Don Speich in the Los Angeles Times on August 15, 16, and 17, 1976, under the general title The Decline of American Education. Working before the Wirtz Panel's report, McCurdy and Speich concluded that diminished content in texts and courses, diminished curricula, underprepared teachers, and disorder in schools were the root causes of the score decline. Seeing test scores as

valid indicators of the condition of education, they argued for radical, perhaps punitive action to fix what was wrong. Most major newspapers republished this series. The Times republished it as a booklet and sent copies to governors, prominent legislators, college and university presidents, and others.

As many will recall, The Decline of American Education provoked fierce discussion and many imitative articles in other papers, and persuaded many leaders that the time for radical reform had come. Coming several months later, On Further Examination acknowledged the apparent validity of some of the earlier analysis, but demonstrated that the problem was vastly more complex than McCurdy and Speich could know when they first wrote. Moreover, the Wirtz Panel cautioned against precipitous, probably counter-productive reform movements. Instead, the Panel urged cautious progress in collaboration with the research community toward better ways to do in schools what schools do.

Second, the Appendices to On Further Examination, a thick collection of the research on which the Wirtz Panel based its tentative findings, brought effectiveness research to the attention of the small number of state policy makers who ordered and read it. This point may seem slight, but it goes a long way toward explaining why consideration of school effectiveness has dominated public policy determinations since 1977. Educational research was largely discredited among state policy makers in the early 1970's. Some reasons: distrust of affective psychology as a force in schools; concern that behavioral studies generally had displaced measures of accomplishment in the thinking in many schools of education; skepticism about the validity of the research advanced in favor of such movements as mainstreaming; the determination that future expenditures, while generally sustaining the new educational ventures of the late 1960's and early 1970's, would go more toward guaranteeing effectiveness than toward enhancing what many governors and legislators had come to see as customer satisfaction of a kind not compatible with the larger social purposes of public education. By 1977, most "education" governors and legislatures distrusted what they had been told about schools in the preceding ten years. With good cause, they blamed educational researchers for some of the problems. On Further Examination's Appendices told them that there were other discussions in progress. The Wirtz Panel, therefore, both damped the impulse toward sudden, radical change, and applied pressure toward more moderate change on more empirical bases.

SREB's Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools has published two reports, The Need for Quality in 1981 and Meeting the Need for Quality in 1983.[4] The essential theses in these reports include that educational change ought to grow out of structured collaboration between the colleges and the schools, that state action ought to include reform of teacher training and certification to make both more academic and less methodological, and that boards ought to require a fundamental or core curriculum

for all students and to avoid proliferating courses that address students' emotional satisfaction, general knowledge of the job market, or specific knowledge of occupations that they are likely not to practice in the end.

These reports do not specifically reflect either SREB's own research, which is considerable and important in its own right as an influence on public policy, or research generally. Rather, they set forth the Task Force's recommendations on how the SREB states ought to deal with commonly acknowledged problems. Their influence on policy in the SREB states has obviously been considerable. SREB governors have taken prominent roles in virtually all phases of educational reform. The SREB Task Force reports have become how-to books for governors and legislators, including many from non-SREB states. The reasons for this impact make an interesting list: SREB's own credibility, in light of some twenty-plus years of conducting research on educational effectiveness and offering the results to governors and legislators in annual training programs; the Task Force's own credibility because of the prior reputations of the legislators, school leaders, board members, and academics on it; and the commonsensical language and contents of the reports themselves. That believable leaders made recommendations that made sense, and did so under the imprimatur of a well established multi-state organization went a long way toward making educational reform and dollar support for education the policy issues that they now are in the Southeast.

The WICHE statistics represent yet another species of influence on policy.[5] Educational planners throughout the 1970's worked with inadequate demographic information. They knew that growth would not last forever. In a few states, they had tangible evidence to prove it. In certain other states, they thought they had evidence that the national decline in the birth rate would not depress enrollments in the public colleges, or in certain public colleges. Yet by and large they were handicapped by the poor quality of the U.S. Census of 1970 and of their own state pupil population censuses when they attempted to explain to their boards and legislatures that the baby boom had fizzled. WICHE's contribution lay primarily in putting together in one place what already existed, and placing it in the hands of governors, legislators, board members, and others who determine policy.

Despite WICHE's publications, and the state statistics on which they are based, many states continue to do what political entities have always done about educational planning. They permit the colleges' or the bureaucracies' ambitions to override common sense. They indulge in a certain amount of political dealing in dividing budgets when perhaps more rational ways exist. They put at least a few of the best projects in the backyards of the most powerful legislators. They watch out for the pet projects of favored presidents, superintendents, or whatever. In a sense, this is as it should be. The process of

political compromise generally looks more orderly from a distance than from a near point of vantage.

But one suspects that the impulse toward business-as-usual may have suffered somewhat, especially in light of the most recent revisions of the WICHE statistics. Like most states, my own builds its higher education budget on poorly conceived and erratically validated enrollment projections that derive more from bargaining between the colleges and the bureaucracy than from systematic analysis of hard data. At least this year our coordinating council reduced the projections when it became apparent that they were too far off the mark to be defensible. Even in the Sunbelt, where few states face major enrollment losses, systematic revisions of the older type of projection must be made in the years between now and 1994.

Finally, an example of what I think may be the highest and best use of research in public policy formation. My state, like more than a third of the states, is subject to an Adams Case consent decree.[6] (The Adams Case is the omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, enforcement action in which the plaintiffs have been represented since 1969 by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. The current defendant is Secretary Bell. The states are indirect parties in that the courts have required federal officials to negotiate and monitor compliance with acceptable desegregation plans in certain states.) The Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education negotiated desegregation plans with most of the Adams states in 1977 or 1978 (and renegotiated in 1983).

The 1977 and 1978 plans are of interest primarily to historians. So far as I know, none succeeded in desegregating previously segregated colleges, and only a few succeeded even marginally in their other provisions. Why? The reasons must include a certain amount of foot-dragging in certain states, a certain amount of blundering in the federal bureaucracy, and a certain amount of public hostility to the goals and timetables by which Title VI is enforced. All of these factors certainly contributed to the generally acknowledged paucity of progress under the 1977 and 1978 plans.

So, however, did another factor that became painfully clear when we negotiated amendments to the 1978 Virginia Plan in 1982 and 1983. No one, state or federal, knew enough about desegregating colleges in 1978 to write a functional plan. The strategies required by O.C.R. in 1978 proved unworkable when the colleges attempted to implement them. Federal officials had no idea as to what was wrong. Both sides wasted a long period of time disliking each other and the plan. Now it happens that the 1978 Virginia Plan included the requirement that the state commission a detailed study of black high school seniors, and that this study was done in two parts by Charlotte Scott and other researchers at the University of Virginia's Tayloe Murphy Institute.[7] (The Institute is <u>not</u> an educational research

organization. Rather, it conducts contractual economic and demographic research. The 1978 Virginia Plan studies are apparently its only ventures into analysis of education.) Virginia's College Bound Black Seniors, 1980, the first Tayloe Murphy Institute study, offered the first comprehensive picture of which courses most black students take in Virginia's high schools and which courses most white students take.

Prior to the 1982 negotiations, the Tayloe Murphy studies had been ignored except among a small group of educational researchers and college admissions officers who knew from professional experience that the findings had enormous importance. Among other things, the reports demonstrated that course choices made as early as grade seven or eight are powerful predictors of eventual entry or non-entry into college, and that black students were vastly less likely than white students to take certain key electives. From the reports, even the casual reader could infer certain characteristics of schools, of advising, and of course programs that would almost inevitably place black students at disadvantage as they progress in school.

The impact on state policy makes for good history. Virginia's 1983 Amendments to the 1978 Plan were built largely from the Tayloe Murphy findings. The strategies produced the state's first successes ever with regard to student enrollment. In recent weeks, O.C.R. has acknowledged that Virginia has made the "substantial progress" required by the Court, and the Legal Defense Fund has decided not to protest this finding. The state still has two additional years of obligations before it will have met the Adams conditions, but the progress is such that all of us are now confident that we are on the right track.

Perhaps of equal importance, Virginia's Board of Education was influenced by the Tayloe Murphy Institute reports in its deliberations about curriculum. Research director Scott published a summary article entitled "College Desegregation: Virginia's Sad Experience" in the Spring 1982 issue of the Virginia Quarterly Review. This article made the case that economic and social disadvantage predict academic disadvantage in ways that are both unnecessary and destructive. In implementing new curricula for all students, and emphasizing education in the core academic disciplines throughout high school, the Board of Education reacted directly to Scott's findings. And so also did key legislators in backing the Board and funding related initiatives.

To this point, I have described a limited set of applications of research findings in forming and implementing public policy. The general principles are probably clear enough. Raw research findings rarely influence policy directly. Intelligent and timely interpretation, like that in On Further Examination or in the SREB reports, matters greatly in bringing research findings into the policy arena. From time to time, fortuitous compilations of previously unanalyzed data, like those

in the WICHE and Tayloe Murphy reports, can change the whole course of public policy by forcing bureaucracies and entrenched interests to face facts.

Beyond these specific kinds of influence, which I have deliberately confined within narrow descriptions, policy makers rarely find in the research literature the kinds of background, analysis, and advice that support sound policy. The fault lies in large part with the research focus in state university schools of education since about 1970. (I realize that all generalization distorts local and specific developments. My interest in discussing the roles of the schools of education is in describing what I see as a broad national trend, not in defending or indicting any specific program.) Policy studies in schools of education is rarely a major pursuit, except in national centers like Stanford, Harvard, and Columbia Teachers College. Yet the value to the states of the work of Patricia Graham of Harvard, Chester Finn of Vanderbilt, and Michael Kirst of Stanford, to choose more or less at random three widely recognized names from a list that might include fifteen names of policy researchers nation-wide who influence state policy, is great. By and large, schools of education in the state colleges and universities have concentrated their research in other areas since about 1970. Consequently, they have played relatively small roles during five very active years for state educational policy. In my own state and certain other SREB states, it would be only truthful to say that the schools of education have suffered major setbacks, especially with regard to their influence on state boards of education and their credibility with the public.

What kinds of educational research will be most likely to influence public policy, and thus build stronger fiscal and regulatory support for schools and colleges, in the next decade or so? To answer the question, one must make certain assumptions that are beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief summary may provide adequate preamble to final comments on where we might go in the effort to improve education generally. One assumption is that many research undertakings are worthwhile even if they never produce tangible results. Practical applicability can be a tyrannical rule if taken too far. Another, however, is that much of our work in the last fifteen years has been replicative. Many scholars have repeated ad infinitum the work of their predecessors, and offered at best modest emendations of previous findings.

Yet another assumption is that the general movement toward more prescriptive curricula in the public schools, toward greater emphasis on academic preparation for teachers, and on demonstrations of measured effectiveness as key components of the case for increased funding for public schools will continue. I make this assumption not because I think that the current wave of political action about education will continue -- it will not; education is not a periennial issue outside the mid-South, and even there it

competes with other issues that show signs of commanding attention as early as this fall -- but because these movements are being institutionalized outside the political forums, in regulations issued by state boards of education, in college entry requirements, and in other mechanisms that have been the historical foundation blocks of educational policy.

Finally, I assume that accountability demands like those now being made of the public schools will eventually come to bear also on the public colleges. Many governors and legislators have become uneasily conscious that not all colleges are equally effective, that not all are essential as the population changes, and that not all are well managed. State leaders have already challenged admission requirements in several states, questioned the curricular controls embodied (or not embodied) in the multistate accreditation agreements. and begun pooling data on the need to hold constant or even to decrease capacity. Several states have scaled back commitments when the answers from the colleges and the state higher education agencies were not persuasive. Even medicine, which has always been a sacred cow among state educational commitments, has felt pressure.

What kinds of research will contribute to sound policy formation and implementation in a climate approximately like what I have just conjectured? A few simplified suggestions:

First, state university schools of education and the NIE Research Labs ought to make policy studies a major research discipline, even if they must give up something else in order to do so. The reasons are both the public interest, which is considerable because of the relative isolation in which state and local boards of education address policy matters, and enlightened institutional self interest, which clearly includes (among other priorities) being useful to those who pay the bills. That the national private universities so clearly dominate this field ought to concern us at least as much as an analogous condition concerned deans of state university schools of business twenty years ago. We need national leadership for many obvious reasons. We also need serious policy researchers available constantly to state leaders and their key staffer.

Second, educational research ought to monitor the effectiveness of new curricula that were originally justified in terms of their effectiveness. Such research ought to address effectiveness both in the traditional terms of educational inquiry, for their usefulness to practitioners, and in the terms of Michael Rutter and his adherents, for their usefulness to policy makers. To the extent that public policy consists largely in effective targeting of public moneys -- positive and negative targeting, educational policy perpetually flirts with fiscal policy. And fiscal policy always embraces measured cost effectiveness. When we spend for education, we temper these considerations with human, societal, and other concerns, but policy implementers cannot avoid defining priorities with a view toward both

accomplishing articulated goals and meeting stringent tests of fiscal accountability. The double perspective makes for sound public administration.

Third and finally, educational research ought, at long last, to develop expertise with regard to the effectiveness of higher education. The list of unreliable methodologies, ill-defined systems, and ineptly managed data is long. Virginia's problems with enrollment projections are no more or less than typical. Retention is ill understood. Comparative studies of graduation and attrition rates are all but unknown, and those that exist rarely hold up under careful analysis. The basic terms have never been defined. The experiences of non-mainstream students have been analyzed from every conceivable perspective of affect, but hard information on what works academically is scarce. Even the most elemental notion of the Fourteenth Amendment would seem to demand that we master this basic research problem, and apply the results in the form of improved high school and college programs. And after almost ten years of Ralph Nader's complaints, too few colleges make proper use of test scores and use quantitative data to inform academic decisions.

These higher education matters ought to alarm us, I think. By coincidence, a usable and remarkably constructive body of research literature existed when the dialogue about the effectiveness of the public schools began. No such body exists for higher education, and education school institutes for the study or higher education, excellent as they generally are, rarely enjoy the financial support necessary for major research. The remedy must come partly from the political leaders who will benefit by access to improved research products. Yet one doubts that politicians will see the higher education institutes as a major issue, just as one doubts that it is in the public interest for the bulk of policy advice on higher education to come from outside higher education -- a condition that exists now in many states. The universities themselves, especially the state universities whose stake in this predictable next phase of policy concern about higher education is so large, will have to make the initial commitments. One suspects that they will have also to sustain them in many states.

Notes

1. L.A. Glenny, Autonomy of Public Colleges: The Challenge of Coordination (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959); John D. Millett, Conflict in Higher Education: State Government Coordination Versus Institutional Independence (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1984); Michael Rutter, Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effect on Children (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 1979).

2. On Further Examination: Report of the Advisory Panel on the Scholastic Aptitude Test Score Decline (New York: The College Entrance Examination Board, 1977); Appendices to On Further Examination, (New York: The College Entrance Examination Board, 1977).

3. "Reforming the School - College Curriculum," SREB Spotlight XIII, 4, 1982.

4. The Need for Quality: A Report to the Southern Regional Education Board by Its Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools, June, 1981 (Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1981); Meeting the Need for Quality; Action in the South, Progress Report to the Southern Regional Education Board, June, 1983 (Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1983).

5. William R. McConnell and Norman Kaufman, High School Graduates: Projections for the Fifty States (1982-2000) (Boulder, Co.: Western Interstate Consortium for Higher Education, 1984). The original WICHE projections were published in 1979.

6. For details, see testimony and documentary submissions of John T. Casteen, III, Hearings on Higher Education Civil Rights Enforcement...Joint Hearings...of the Committee on Education and Labor...and...Committee on the Judiciary...House of Representatives...May 17, 18, 25, 1983 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. 59-146, 151-159 passim.

7. Tayloe Murphy Institute, Virginia's College Bound Black Seniors ([Richmond:] State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 1980; Charlotte H. Scott and John A. Alexander, Enrollment of Virginia's 1980 Black High School Graduates in Colleges and Universities ([Charlottesville, Virginia]: Taylce Murphy Institute, 1981). See also Charlotte H. Scott, "College Desegregation: Virginia's Sad Experience," Virginia Quarterly Review 58, 2, Spring, 1982, 221-235.